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Atari Online News, Etc.  
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~ New Atom Chips Roll Out ~ Online Scam Losses Up! ~ Violence = Relaxed?

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-\* OOXML Is Adopted As International Standard \*-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard  
"~~~~~"

"Saying it like it is!"

Another terrible week for weather, except for one day in which we got a teasing of warmth. The long range forecast for next week claims some better temperatures, but I remember what part of the country that I live; the weather can change in a matter of hours! Hopefully...

Before I get on my own soapbox this week, I just want to use Joe's for a second. I read his column this week - early, as I am wont to do every week. CLANG!! He hit that bell dead-on this week. I don't want to spoil any of Joe's comments for you by my elaborating with some of my opinions on the subjects. But suffice it to say that money - one way or another - is a major part of the problems we face today (and probably yesterday, as well!).

Meanwhile, back to my soapbox. Spam, and not the stuff that comes in a can. What is it's purpose? Hmmm, money (see, I managed to quickly relate to it being the root of "all evil"!?). I don't know about you, but I get a few hundred spam messages a day. 99% of these go to one address, which I have sort of "sacrificed" as a spam magnet since the address has been published all over the web. The unfortunate part of this is that the address does get some legitimate mail. But I've managed to be able to quickly cull out the good mail and delete everything else quickly.

What amazes me about spam is the numerous topics of content. Scam schemes, I understand, although I can't understand how people can be taken in by them. Then again, as a report further along in this week's issue shows, money lost to online scams is on the rise. Are people really that stupid??? Stupid or naively trusting - who knows.

I mean really. How many times do I really need to be sent e-mails telling me about Viagra and its relatives. Do these people really believe that I would (if I were going to buy) get those drugs from some unknown web site? If I responded to every e-mail received, I think that I'd have seen most of the starlets of Hollywood nude by now. Just imagine how many "real" college diplomas I could have by now! And, if I believed some of these messages, I could be the stud to end all studs (and probably break all records in Guinness!). Hmmm, banks accounts that I don't even have have been compromised! Even if these spammers are lucky enough to guess my personal bank, do they really think that I'm going to "resolve" the problem over the net rather than in person?

And just how many watches do I need? Think I might want to see a watch before buying, even if it is a Rolex? Online gambling and you're going to spot me some big money to try it? Yeah, right. Pirated software,

yup, that's a big one! I really do need to own a few thousand pirated copies of Vista and everything else being offered.

Uh-oh, I forgot that I need to help that guy in Nigeria get his fortune out of the country so he doesn't lose it. Sure, I know that if I send him some money in advance, or provide my bank account info - I'll be highly rewarded for my good deed! Why haven't I responded by now!?!?

I can't remember if it was P.T. Barnum or W.C. Fields who claimed that "there's a sucker born every minute!". But whoever it was, he was correct.

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING  
compiled by Joe Mirando  
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. There really aren't enough messages this week to make a good column, but I'm going to do it anyway, because there are a couple of things I want to talk about. There were 22 new messages in the NewsGroup this week. Normally, I'd just squirrel them away and add them to next week's messages... and maybe to the following week's too... and save them up until there WERE enough to make a good column.

Now, I heard that heavy sigh you let out when I said I had a couple of things I want to talk about, and that's okay. If you decide to skip down to the UseNet stuff, well, that's up to you. But I hope you'll at least scan some of the stuff I'm going to get off my chest.

For the past couple of weeks, I've been hearing about school systems looking to cut money. That's nothing new. Funding education is usually looked down upon by people who've already gotten their education. Another sad case of the "I've got mine; you get yours" philosophy.

In 'the good old days', you could count on a one-room schoolhouse with a single school teacher that all the grades. The school budget was basically her (or sometimes 'his') salary, chalk, maybe a new chalkboard, a map or two, and upkeep on the schoolhouse and its contents.

But today, we've got multi-million dollar 'facilities'. Granted, there is a lot more than can be done in this modern age, but I think we've lost sight of what school is for. It's not for teaching your little neo-yuppie self-important bundle of entitlement that it's wrong to hit someone in the head with a baseball bat or that you don't stomp around and whine when you don't get exactly what you want... that's YOUR job. Nobody gives a tinker's damn how busy you are. If you're too busy to be a parent to your kids, sell the little bastards and stop expecting teachers to socialize them for you. Kids don't learn what they're taught; they learn what they're shown. They learn about what's

acceptable by watching the biggest influences in their lives... YOU.

So, anyway, there are several school systems in my area that are, as are most public school systems, facing funding short-falls. Of course, the federal government is no longer providing the funding they used to... even for their mandated programs like 'no child left behind'... oh, don't get me started on that one. Oops... too late!

No Child Left Behind... unless they're left behind.  
The premise of NCLB is that we need standards to make sure that everyone has access to a good, solid education. Sounds good, right? I mean, how could anyone complain about that?

The problem is that the schools are now 'teaching to the test'. All that matters is being able to pass a test. The processes involved don't matter, the ability to reason doesn't matter. All that matters is being able to pass that one test so that the school system doesn't lose their federal dollars. And therein lies the rub. School systems that cannot clear the bar set by the government... the systems that evidently need the most help... lose their funding.

Add to that the fact that we now have "administration" entering the picture. As far as I'm concerned, half of these people can go take a flying... well, you get the idea. School is about teaching, not about administration. Sure, we need administrators. But keep 'em where they belong. Keep 'em in their little offices, ordering notebooks and pencils for the kids and teachers, and keep 'em the hell out of the classrooms. Teachers need authority. It's bad enough that they've got to deal with first-generation self-important yuppies who figure that teachers are their employees and therefore their kids feel that the teachers are their employees.

When I was a kid, we had science fairs. Real science fairs when you would go down into your father's workshop or garage or just out in the back yard and made something yourself. Me? my big memory was constructing a telegraph with my father. It was really a simple setup. A couple of pieces of wood, a handful of nails, a tin can and a pair of tin snips, a 6 volt battery and some electrical wire. I learned about Morse code, about working in concert with someone else, about electricity and magnetism, and I even learned (after the messy demise of a couple of tin cans) that sometimes you've got to start over when you make a mistake. No, it wasn't splitting the atom and it wasn't the next big thing in String Theory... it was old-school. It was "how things work" and it was "I made it myself".

Now, I don't want you to get the idea that I'm against solar cells, models of the space shuttle, computers or any of the modern affectations of today's school science fairs, but we're losing perspective. Take some time to teach your kids that how you do things is as important as getting the answer right. Teach them that a computer is a tool, not a teacher, that a teacher is an instructor, not a babysitter. And most of all, teach them that they are but a small part of the overall whole. Teach them that there's nothing wrong with that, and that what's most important is doing their best and being the best they can be.

When I was a kid we had a 'rocket club', a band, the chess club, etc. These things were all done on a shoestring. Parents pitched in, the community chipped in. We had fund drives, we collected old news papers and bottles and cans, we MADE things to sell at and after PTA

meetings... all to scrape together the money we needed for rocket motors and band uniforms and padding for the chess club members. [grin]

We didn't fight the administration for one very good reason: The administration was WITH us! I can still remember the Principal attending the first "demonstration" from our rocket club, and he was clapping and cheering louder than any parent in the group. He was proud of his teachers and his students. The 'administration', by the way, consisted of the Principal and his secretary... no, she wasn't an administrative assistant, she was a secretary. She was damned good at it, and that was good enough for everyone involved. She always did her best, and he always respected and valued her... radical, huh?

The other thing that's got my knickers in a bunch today is also to do with the education system... it's this damned tendency to institute "zero-tolerance" policies. What we should be teaching is tolerance, not zero tolerance. Zero is nothing, so zero tolerance is INTolerance. Is that what we want to teach our kids? That it's okay to be intolerant?

I've got a nephew that just got a suspension for fighting in school. Now, I'm all for discipline and rules, but let's face it; kids will, from time to time, fight. Hell, I got into a fight or two when I was in school. The detention and talking-to I got from the Principal was nothing compared to what I knew would be waiting for me at home. Back in those days, discipline was seen as a family virtue, not an institutional one, and my parents ALWAYS took the teacher's side. There was no "who do you think you are? You're JUST a teacher" and there was never ever any "my son is special so it must be the other kid's fault". I was responsible for my own actions, and I was expected to deal with the consequences.

Man, this has gotten a lot longer than I had planned on, so let's just sum up, okay?

Kids don't learn from what you tell them, they learn from what you SHOW them, so respect their teachers, make the kid responsible for his own actions, help them with their homework and projects, don't try to be their best friend... they've got enough friends. What they need is a parent... an example of what an upright citizen should be, not a beacon of how to blame things on others and deflect responsibility. Show them that, even though you're an adult, there's still always room to grow and to grow up. Remember, these little rugrats are the ones you're going to count on to take care of you in your old age. [Grin]

What does this have to do with computers in general and Atari computers specifically? Nothing. Except that we need, as always, to put things in perspective. Computers are tools, not ends unto themselves. Maybe WE need to remember that, as well as teaching it to our kids.

Well, we never did get to look at the UseNet messages, did we? I'll keep 'em and use them next week. 'Till then, keep your ears open so you'll hear what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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[illegible]

Final Fantasy: Crisis Core!  
Violence = Relaxed?  
And more!

[illegible]

## 'Crisis Core' A Must Add to Your 'Final Fantasy' Library

The title Final Fantasy has become synonymous with gaming, and arguably the game that resonated strongest with its fans is 1997's Final Fantasy VII.

Over ten years later, the tale first told on the original PlayStation returns to the forefront on the PlayStation Portable in Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII, an elaborate adventure with a dynamic story and engaging combat system.

Crisis Core serves as a prologue to Final Fantasy VII. You play the role of Zack, an elite Soldier with the Shinra Company. The story begins with Zack and mentor Angeal investigating the disappearance of a fellow Soldier and his squad.

As with most Final Fantasy chapters, story is core to the experience. Writers effectively capture the camaraderie between characters, particularly Zack and Cloud, protagonist. Players also get a glimpse at other key figures, including Aerith and Sephiroth.

The presentation sets an epic tone. The computer-generated cut scenes are astonishing, even on the PSP's small screen. Musical transitions between calm and combat are handled nicely, often flipping from a soothing tune to a vicious riff of heavy guitars. One drawback is the inability to skip cut scenes if you must replay a level.

Combat and exploration work well on the portable. You wander through towns and other landscapes, talking with characters and gathering information. An e-mail system lets you correspond with characters you meet in your journey.

Unlike most RPGs, which utilize turn-based battles, combat occurs in real time. The bottom of the screen is where you'll find your health, magic and attack meters. To the lower right is a row of orbs representing abilities.

The orbs range from a simple sword attack, to magic spells, Materia or the ability to access items. You'll use the left and right shoulder buttons to toggle between each. It's tricky at first, especially when

grabbing items.

Inventory menus are slick and easy to navigate. You can customize Zack's equipment, buy items from shops, and fuse different Materia into new spells.

Special moves are handled through a Digital Mind Wave, a slot-reel mechanic that channels past experiences with other characters into a powerful attack. At random points during combat, the DMW spins. One set of panels shows characters and another numbers. Matching three faces sets up your attacks, while the numbers determine Zack's ability to level up. It's an intriguing approach, but you lose control of how your character grows.

If you need a break from the lengthy campaign, Crisis Core offers dozens of side missions, most of which focus on clearing an area of enemies. They're short and sweet, providing quick diversions.

Fans of Final Fantasy will find the additional backstory in Crisis Core riveting, and should consider their collection incomplete without it.

### Sports Themes Dominate New Game Releases

New games releases for spring 2008 include a range of sport themes, with a new version of Pro Evolution Soccer 2008 specially for Wii, a blue tennis-playing hedgehog, high-def racing cars and a "god of war" combat game, complete with high gore and ancient Greek mythology.

#### Pro Evolution Soccer 2008:

While X-box 360 and PS3 owners have been putting the boot in since last autumn, Wii users have been awaiting their own adaptation of the game, and here it is.

The programmers from Konami, who totally rethought the commands for use with Wii toggles, Wiimote and nunchuk, have included, among other novelties, the possibility of moving defenders up field, to trap the other team's forward players offside, by lifting the Wiimote with a yank, or firing a nunchuk shot. Other new features include improved facial animation and 30 new stadiums.

And whereas in most football games it's not possible to direct one player at a time, here, the Wiimote, helped by a cursor which appears on the screen, allows users to point at individual players and give orders, even when he doesn't have the ball, giving the new Pro Evolution Soccer a totally new strategic dimension.

Unnerving to start with, getting to grips with the different phases of the game is helped by clear instructions given during the game.

But one major regret is the disappearance of the Masters League, which has been replaced by another, less convincing system.

From three years. Developed and edited by Konami. Released March in Europe and the US.

#### Tennis Hedgehog:

Sega superstars tennis puts Sega's blue hedgehog and other well-known characters on a series of unusual courts to play a less than traditional game of tennis. The title harks back to classic Sega arcade games of the 1980s and 1990s like Space Harrier, Outrun, After Burner and Golden Axe and the like, as does the soundtrack which showers winning players with nostalgic numbers.

Online reviews point to the fact that although the characters aren't all A-listers and the actual tennis isn't particularly great, the game comes off well, thanks to interesting court design and the music.

Easy accessibility of the game is also a plus, though playing with friends is advised, because users quickly get the measure of a one on one game.

From seven years. Developed by Sumo Digital, Edited by Sega, for Xbox 360, PS3 and Wii. Released March in Europe and the US.

With God of War:

Chains of Olympus, after two Playstation 2 adventures, and before its arrival on PS3, the Spartan warrior Kratos makes his debut on the portable Sony console.

The least said is that the tribulations of the "Ghost of Sparta" are as bloody as ever, and in this latest version players discover the past life of Kratos and his battles in the service of the gods of Olympus, before his rebellion against Mars, god of war.

Apart from that, and as with all "God of War" games, players are invited to massacre warriors and mythic monsters with sharpened blades from the first second of play. Combat follows combat in a frenzy, with graphics and animation of top quality, but not aimed at sensitive souls.

For over 18. Developed by Ready at Dawn Studios. Edited by Sony. Released in March in Europe and the US.

Gran Turismo 5 Prologue:

This is the latest in the game which is an institution in the virtual car-racing world, and again pushes the limits of racing realism on asphalt, dirt track or snow.

Following number four, Sony has brought out, several months before the final version a "prologue" of the finished game Gran Turismo 5 - a kind of major "demo" model - in an apparent effort to calm, or increase, demand for the real thing. This highlights Sony's commercial genie, managing to sell in less than 12 months, both a draft and final version of the same game.

Novelties include the appearance of Ferrari among the 71 cars and five circuits, as well as a new online mode allowing players to taken on up to 15 other drivers.

Graphically, as always, the game offers quality video-like images of the cars. It is also easy to handle and fab for car lovers who don't like to see their precious motor damaged. Whether GT 5, expected to be released at the end of the year, keeps the promises of the Prologue remains to be



seen.

From three years. Developed by Polyphony Digital, edited by Sony.  
Released in March in Europe, in April in America.

#### Game On: 'Backyard Baseball '09'

Atari has scored the cover coup of the season, landing the Red Sox's David Ortiz - an actual World Series hero! - for its baseball game. Big Papi leads a troupe of kid-size all-stars, including Vladimir Guerrero and Alex Rodriguez, as well as a gang of neighborhood Little Leaguers, male and female, for this lively re-creation of sandlot ball.

"Backyard" is easy enough for younger players - it's really hard to strike out - and moves along zippily. And it throws a bunch of wacky power-ups, like a superfast "meteor ball" into the action. It doesn't have the depth of more grownup offerings, but will entertain any kid who's ever dreamed about playing alongside Ichiro Suzuki.

#### Violent Video Games Make People More Relaxed

Holy irony, Batman! People who play violent games online actually feel relaxed after they have played a round of bloody fun.

This according to new research discovered by Develop Magazine, which found that a sampling of 292 World of Warcraft players, ages 12-83 years, were more likely to feel calm or tired after playing a round of the popular online game.

"There were actually higher levels of relaxation before and after playing the game as opposed to experiencing anger but this did very much depend on personality type," said Jane Barnett, who headed the Middlesex study. Translation: If you're an aggressive jackass before you play a video game, you'll still be one after; and video games don't magically turn peaceful people into violent offenders.

Barnett added the research will help develop an emotion and gaming questionnaire to help distinguish the type of gamer who is likely to transfer their online aggression into everyday life.

We at GamePro believe the questionnaire will also help weed out blatant media-hungry opportunists who have used the relatively young video game genre as a platform for blatant self-promotion.

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## ISO Adopts OOXML as International Standard

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has adopted an international standard based on Microsoft's Office Open XML document format, according to documents circulated by a member of a Dutch national standards committee.

ISO does not intend to announce the ballot results until Wednesday, but sent them to national standards bodies on Monday.

Of the 87 countries taking part, 61 approved the draft standard DIS29500, 10 disapproved and 16 abstained.

There's more work for ISO ahead, as it has yet to decide who will control future development and improvement of the standard.

"It would have been better for the world, probably, if it had gone back to the drawing board and come back as an ISO standard in two years, with all the work done," said Michiel Leenaars, the Dutch standards committee member who circulated the results.

## IOC: Uncensored Internet and No TV Delay in Beijing

Media will have access to uncensored Internet and there will be no delay of the television signal at the Beijing Olympic Games, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said on Thursday.

China routinely censors the Internet and delays or censors television signals but the IOC's chief inspector said Beijing organizers had assured his team that the 30,000 media expected to cover the August 8-24 Games would not be effected.

"We were satisfied by the assurances we received across a number of areas - media service levels, including Internet access ... and the live broadcast feed," Hein Verbruggen told a news conference at the end of the final inspection of preparations for the Games.

The IOC's press chief Kevan Gosper said earlier this week that he would be insisting on an "open" Internet in line with Beijing's commitment to allow media to report on the Games in the same way they had at past Olympics.

IOC officials said they had been given to understand that access to the "open" Internet would apply not only to those accredited media in the main media centers and venues, but also in the centre for non-accredited media.

Verbruggen said the television signal would be controlled by the Beijing Olympic Broadcasters and, despite a report last week, there had "never been any discussion" of it not being live.

"There will be a live feed and it is up to every broadcaster to do with it what they want to do," he said.

He also said television cameras would be allowed to film on Beijing's central Tiananmen Square.

Overall, Verbruggen said, his team had been impressed with preparations for the Games.

"BOCOG is progressing well with all of its operations and we are confident that our Chinese friends will put on a great Games for the athletes of the world," he added.

"The IOC noted an increased level of support from the government authorities for the organizing committee, which will undoubtedly help reinforce BOCOG's excellent work."

#### Intel Unveils New Classmate PCs

Intel Corp. unveiled new features for its line of low-cost laptops for schools Wednesday, adding bigger screens and more data storage capacity as the chip maker ratchets up its rivalry with the One Laptop per Child organization, which sells a competing machine.

Intel's new Classmate PCs - slated to go on sale in April for between \$300 and \$500 - reflect the company's growing efforts to sell computers equipped with its own chips to schools in developing countries, a battleground for technology companies because of the millions of people there just coming online.

But the target market has expanded to include kids in the U.S. as potential users of cheaper, stripped-down machines.

Classmate PCs also are part of Intel's push to generate interest in a new class of mobile devices the company is calling "netbooks," which are smaller and have fewer functions than standard laptops but also use far less power and are easier to carry around.

Other tweaks to the Classmate that Intel announced Wednesday from its developer forum in Shanghai include the availability of both 7-inch and 9-inch screens, a 30 gigabyte hard disk drive and an integrated Web camera.

At the developer forum, Intel executives also rolled out five new processors under the "Atom" brand name. The chips are designed for pocket-size Internet devices. The chips come in speeds up to 1.86 gigahertz while using less than 3 watts of power.

Intel said its Classmate PCs will eventually use Atom processors.

Classmates are based on Intel's design and include its processors, but they are built by other manufacturers and sold under a variety of brand names. The first generation went on sale in March 2007 with the 7-inch screen and fewer functions. Intel said it has sold "tens of thousands" of the machines but declined to provide more specific data.

Intel and OLPC have feuded furiously over their competing products.

The Cambridge, Mass.-based nonprofit OLPC says it has sold hundreds of thousands of its \$188 machines.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology spinoff's low-cost XO laptop includes a microprocessor from Advanced Micro Devices Inc., the world's No. 2 microprocessor maker behind Intel.

A short-lived truce between Intel and OLPC ended earlier this year when Intel suddenly pulled out from OLPC's board of directors.

Intel claimed it couldn't continue cooperating with OLPC when founder Nicholas Negroponte demanded Intel stop selling Classmates overseas. Negroponte said the dispute stemmed from Intel sales reps disparaging OLPC products while pushing Intel's own machines.

### Time Is Right for Linux PCs To Emerge

The free Linux operating system handles big tasks like running supercomputers and ATMs. Now Linux has a chance to finally crack Microsoft Corp.'s hold on computing's most visible domain - mainstream PCs - because of the rise of innovative, inexpensive machines.

Of course, prognosticators perennially say Linux is on the verge. It gets high marks for security and stability and is widely used behind the scenes in corporate servers, making it a natural candidate to steal desktop thunder from Microsoft's dominant Windows. And yet Linux PCs still represent less than 2 percent of the market.

This time, though, there's actually evidence of momentum.

While the best features in the latest Windows release, Vista, require top-notch configurations that can quickly ramp up a PC's price, one of the hottest segments of the industry involves inexpensive computers.

Laptops under \$400 are real possibilities now, and some of the most buzz-worthy use Linux, such as Asustek Computer Inc.'s EeePC and the One Laptop Per Child Foundation's \$200 "XO" computer for schoolchildren. Linux also is available on slim little "netbooks" being pushed by Intel Corp.

Not only is Linux essentially free to the PC vendor, but the operating system also is better suited than Vista for cheap PCs' spartan hardware designs. (Windows XP is available on scaled-back PCs like Intel's Classmate, but it's unclear what will happen after Microsoft soon stops selling XP to the general public.)

Amazon.com's top-selling PCs include several Asustek Linux machines. Although Wal-Mart Stores Inc. recently stopped a test run of selling Linux PCs in some stores, the company says it will continue to offer them online.

Business computing suppliers are finding open-source desktops especially gaining traction in cost-conscious developing markets. For example, a PC distributor in Eastern Europe is packaging software from IBM Corp. and Linux vendor Red Hat Inc. to create Microsoft-free desktops for that market.

One buyer is Aleksandar Spagnut, a director of Moscow-based Rushotel, which needed new desktop PCs for a hotel-building project. Spagnut said

his company saved 30 to 35 percent over comparable Windows machines. He added that Linux PCs are now common enough that a snowball effect is emerging, whereby technical support and "drivers" - which essentially tell programs how to interact with hardware - are much easier to find.

"This really makes the difference," he said.

Linux might benefit from a changing conception of what computers are for. With the rise of Web-based applications that reduce the need for desktop-bound software, more of the action comes through an Internet browser now. The feel of the underlying operating system is less important.

That means Linux consumers can get a lot out of their computers even if they are put off by what many reviewers still cite as Linux's biggest flaw: its uneven user-friendliness. Some tweaks to Linux machines require higher-than-average computing savvy, although this is less of an issue than in the past.

Perhaps more importantly, if the desktop operating system fades further into the background, PC makers could have greater incentive to save money on it by offering Linux. The price that big PC manufacturers pay Microsoft for Windows varies and is not disclosed, but is believed to commonly exceed \$50 per PC.

"I'm a big believer in the inevitable forces of economics - they're like glaciers," said Mark Shuttleworth, CEO of Canonical Ltd., which this month is releasing a new version of Ubuntu, a leading version of Linux that can run PCs. "Glaciers carve out terrain. It takes time."

Linux on the desktop doesn't have to take off like crazy to really start to matter. Of the 981 million PCs in existence worldwide last year, 1.7 percent ran Linux, according to Gartner Inc. That sounds paltry. But Apple's Mac operating system accounted for just 2.5 percent, and Apple is considered a significant, influential alternative to Windows.

"Every point is billions of dollars to Microsoft," says Jim Zemlin, head of The Linux Foundation, a consortium devoted to advancing Linux. His group is meeting with top PC makers next week in Austin, Texas, in hopes of accelerating their efforts to sell Linux machines.

The top PC makers have so far treaded carefully. Dell Inc.'s Web site sells Ubuntu computers in a separate section for open-source PCs, out of direct comparison with Windows machines. Dell spokeswoman Anne Camden said the placement reflects the fact that Linux is still not a mainstream consumer product.

Linux is partly hampered by its greatest asset: its widely dispersed nature.

Linux is a core set of code called a kernel; developers build different layers of software on top of it to serve different computing purposes. (Open-source providers make money by charging for add-on services, such as technical support or security upgrades.)

As a result, Linux comes in many flavors, known as distributions, fracturing the push Linux might otherwise make. In fact, some programs written for one distribution don't work in another.

"We haven't figured out to how to federate the marketing of the

technology as well as we've figured out how to develop the technology," Zemlin acknowledged.

#### Gates Sees Next Windows "Sometime" in Next Year

Microsoft Corp. co-founder Bill Gates said on Friday he expected the new version of Windows operating software, code-named Windows 7, to be released "sometime in the next year or so."

The software giant has been aiming to issue more regular updates of the operating system software that powers the majority of the world's personal computers. Nevertheless, Gates' comments suggested that a successor to the Vista program might be released sooner than was generally expected.

Microsoft has said it expected to release a new version of Windows approximately 3 years after the introduction of Vista in January 2007. A company spokeswoman said Gates' comments are in line with a development cycle that usually releases a test version of the software before its official introduction.

"I'm superenthused about what it will do in lots of ways," Gates said in a seminar on corporate philanthropy held during an annual meeting in Miami of the Inter-American Development Bank.

"That'll be sometime in the next year or so that we'll have a new version," Gates said in response to a question from the audience.

Gates, who is due to leave his day-to-day functions at Microsoft and dedicate himself to the philanthropic efforts of the Gates Foundation in June, said the company aimed through its \$6 billion annual research and development budget to take the products running on its software to "the next level."

He said new versions of Windows would help revolutionize mobile phones and run the desk of the future, which would have a touch surface display allowing users to call up items using their hands.

#### Intel Rolls Out Atom Chips

Intel Corp is rolling out five new Atom microprocessors and a collection of chips designed for portable gadgets that access the Internet and for other uses, as the world's largest chipmaker uses its marketing muscle to help create a new market.

The low-power, tiny Atom chips will come in speeds of up to 1.86 gigahertz and Intel says that speed, plus other technologies designed into the chip, make it the fastest processor that consumes 3 watts of electricity or less.

The recently named Atom family of processors is part of Intel's effort to have chips designed with Intel Architecture - the fundamental blueprint of its semiconductors - in myriad computing devices - from what it calls mobile Internet devices, or MID's, all the way up to high-performance

computers.

Intel is making the announcements at its Intel Developer Forum conference on Wednesday in Shanghai, the company said.

"Global Internet growth continues unabated," said Anand Chandrasekher, who runs Intel's Ultra Mobility Group. "The best Internet experience is still on the PC, but users want to carry that experience with them."

That is where the Atom and Centrino Atom, come in. The Centrino Atom also includes a single-chip with integrated graphics called Intel System Controller Hub that allows for PC-like capabilities and long battery life for devices that fit in a user's pocket.

"Intel is really pumping this category," said Roger Kay, an analyst with market research firm Endpoint Technologies Associates. "That said, mobile Internet is here. For them this is really a great potential business."

Intel said that the features of the Atom processor - the "brains" of an electronic device - and its system controller hub would help device makers create a range of MIDs with differing functions and designs.

Chandrasekher said major device makers are already planning to adopt Atom, with more than 20 manufacturers coming out with products using the processor. As far as MIDs, those will start shipping in May, he said.

He said Intel expects about 30 percent of those MIDs to have both WiFi - short range high-speed wireless Internet access - and WiMax - longer-range high-speed access designed into them.

MID device makers include Asus, Fujitsu, Lenovo, NEC, Panasonic, Samsung, Sharp and Toshiba, among others, and prices will probably average about \$500, with some priced higher than that or lower, depending on the functions, Chandrasekher said in a telephone briefing ahead of his keynote speech at the IDF in Shanghai.

The small size of the Atom processor - the die of the chip is less than 25 square millimeters, or about a 10th of the low- cost Celeron desktop and notebook PC chip - also lets Intel target the embedded market.

Embedded chips are used in devices such as portable cash registers, robotics for industrial manufacturing, kiosks, patient monitoring and car "infotainment" systems.

The economics of the diminutive chip are appealing, Kay said, noting Intel gets nearly 2,700 Atom processors from a single dinner-plate-size silicon wafer.

He estimates Intel could yield about \$30,000 per wafer with a gross margin of around 50 percent, not far off the gross margin of its mainstream PC chips. He put Intel's approximate cost-per-chip for Atom at about \$11.

"If you start looking at that number, then the profitability of one of these things sold at \$45, or even \$160, they're fantastically profitable," Kay said.

Still, do not expect the MID and this new market to take off right out of the gate.

"The world often divides half way between the reality on the ground and where Intel would like it to go," Kay added. "It'll likely go a little more slowly than Intel would like."

### eBay Yanks Sale of Hacked Vista Laptop

Shane Macaulay's attempt to sell a hacked laptop complete with Windows Vista attack code did not last long.

eBay pulled the listing within hours of its appearance Monday, saying that it could have harmed users. "You can't sell anything that would do harm," said a spokeswoman for eBay's public relations agency.

The company removed the listing between 11 p.m. Monday and 12:30 a.m. Tuesday, Pacific Time, after eBay employees noticed the post. "It was the wording of the listing that caught the attention of the trust and safety experts who monitor the site," the spokeswoman said.

Macaulay won last week's PWN 2 OWN hacking contest at the CanSecWest conference in Vancouver. He had offered the laptop he broke into for sale, claiming that his exploit code could probably still be extracted from the machine.

"This laptop is a good case study for any forensics group/company/individual that wants to prove how cool they are, and a live example, not canned of what a typical incident response sitchiation [sic] would look like," his listing stated.

Although the laptop was listed on eBay just before April 1, a traditional day of Internet pranks, Macaulay insisted it was legitimate.

Macaulay, a researcher with the Security Objectives consultancy, was one of two hackers to claim laptops and cash prizes for penetrating systems during last week's contest. Organizers offered Vista, Mac OS and Linux-based laptops for the taking, along with prizes that varied from US\$5,000 to \$20,000, depending on the difficulty of the exploit. By Friday, however, only the Linux laptop remained unbreached.

Though the laptop he hacked runs Vista, Macaulay claimed that his Adobe Flash Player exploit will affect 90 percent of computers worldwide. He won a \$5,000 cash prize, courtesy of 3Com's TippingPoint division, and the Fujitsu U810 laptop he had hacked into for his work.

Had Macaulay been able to sell his laptop before Adobe patched the issue, he would have violated his contract with TippingPoint, said Terri Forslof, the company's manager of security response. "We would have disqualified him from the program," she said.

The laptop had not been hit with any other attack code during the course of the contest, she added. "He was the only person who tried," she said.

### The War on Spam: A Battlefield Report

When the U.S. Federal Trade Commission announced a US\$2.9 million



settlement with online marketing firm ValueClick this month, it was a record monetary settlement under the 4-year-old CAN-SPAM Act.

That announcement came just days after so-called spam king Robert Soloway pleaded guilty in Seattle to a number of criminal charges. Soloway, who faced one count related to CAN-SPAM in addition to mail fraud, wire fraud and other charges, faces up to 26 years in prison.

But despite these recent court cases, some critics don't see a lot of value in CAN-SPAM, short for Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography and Marketing.

"CAN-SPAM has had virtually no impact on the spam problem at large," said Ray Everett-Church, a longtime spam fighter and director of policy and professional services at Habeas, a company that provides e-mail authentication services. "It has enabled the FTC to take action against a few bad actors, and that has worked to deter some otherwise legitimate companies from playing fast and loose with the rules."

But spam is as big a problem as ever, and the worst spammers "remain unfazed and undeterred" by CAN-SPAM, Everett-Church said. Everett-Church and other antispam activists criticize CAN-SPAM for allowing marketers to send unsolicited commercial e-mail until people opt out.

Harvard University technology security officer Scott Bradner called spam prosecutions and settlements "all too rare" in a recent column at Network World. "To say that the FTC has been careful in its approach to enforcing this act would be misleading - a better word would be 'lethargic' or maybe 'comatose,'" he wrote.

Officials with the FTC and the U.S. Department of Justice say criminal spam cases can be difficult to investigate because spammers often hide their identities through falsified e-mail headers, offshore servers, and affiliate senders and payment processors. Still, the DOJ has prosecuted about a dozen criminal spam cases in the past four years, and the FTC has taken civil action in 31 CAN-SPAM cases, according to officials at both agencies.

Including cases before CAN-SPAM passed, the FTC has taken action in more than 90 spam cases, involving more than 250 defendants. In addition, CAN-SPAM allows state attorneys general to file lawsuits against spammers, and several have done so.

At the DOJ, CAN-SPAM has helped prosecutors build cases against spammers, and in some cases, the spam charges have led to other charges, DOJ officials said.

Among the cases: The DOJ in January indicted 11 people, including alleged master spammer Alan Ralsky, accusing them of using a sophisticated and extensive spamming operation that fueled a stock pump-and-dump scheme. The defendants allegedly used spam to tout Chinese penny stocks, driving up the price of the stock and selling it at artificially inflated prices, according to the DOJ.

In June 2007, a federal jury in Phoenix convicted two U.S. men on charges of conspiracy, fraud, money laundering and transportation of obscene materials, in a case in which the defendants were accused of sending pornographic images in millions of pieces of unwanted e-mail. The case, which began as a CAN-SPAM investigation, escalated to include other charges, and the DOJ found that children had received some of the

"hardcore" e-mails, a DOJ official said.

CAN-SPAM allowed the DOJ to investigate the defendants for falsifying headers on their e-mail and their domain name registrations, said a DOJ official. That led investigators to find other illegal behavior, she said.

The FTC sees a couple of large benefits from CAN-SPAM, said Lois Greisman, associate director of the FTC's Division of Marketing Practices. The law set the rules for legitimate marketers: Commercial e-mail must have a working opt-out mechanism, must include a valid postal address for the sender, and cannot contain falsified header information or deceptive subject lines, among other rules. CAN-SPAM and FTC rules also require pornographic e-mail to be labeled as such.

CAN-SPAM "set out, in black and white, what the rules of the road are," Greisman said.

In addition, the law gives the FTC the power to seek civil penalties against spammers, authority the agency doesn't have under the FTC Act, the law that prohibits unfair business practices and governs most FTC action. The ValueClick settlement and other large CAN-SPAM settlements should put other spammers on notice, Greisman said.

In November, the FTC announced a \$650,000 settlement with Adteractive, which sent spam promising free gifts such as Xboxes and television sets. And in January, the FTC announced a \$200,000 settlement with Member Source Media, which promised free iPods, gift cards and other products in its e-mail messages.

"Our ability to obtain civil penalties there, I think, will have an effective deterrent impact," Greisman said.

The FTC doesn't need additional spam-fighting tools, she said. CAN-SPAM can be used in conjunction with the FTC's other powers, including the ability to seek asset freezes and injunctions in court, Greisman said. "We can walk into federal court, and with the right set of facts, shut down fraudulent operations," Greisman said. "That's a powerful tool." In addition, spam filters are largely working, even if the amount of spam that's sent isn't going down, she said. "It's less the bombardment than it used to be," she said.

Antispam vendors say CAN-SPAM's had no real impact on the amount of spam being sent, however. In 2003, 35 to 40 percent of all e-mail was spam, and now that number is 80 to 90 percent, said Matt Sergeant, senior antispam technologist at MessageLabs. But at the same time, MessageLabs has gone from blocking about 90 percent of spam to 99 percent, he added.

But CAN-SPAM has provided some benefits, added Eytan Urbas, vice president of products for Mailshell, another antispam vendor. CAN-SPAM created rules for the "good guys" to follow and allowed the prosecution of the "biggest and worst" spammers, he said. "Spam is growing, but I don't blame CAN-SPAM for that," he added.

Many smaller spammers continue to get away with it, however, Urbas said. "In most cases, [spam] is not the highest priority for law enforcement," he added.

And much of the spam in U.S. inboxes comes from outside the country, he said. "It's hard enough to extradite major criminals, or violent criminals, but there's no extradition for spam," he said.

## Losses Rise in Online Scams

Money lost in Internet-related crimes hit a new high last year, topping about \$240 million, according to a government report showing increases in scams involving pets, check-cashing schemes and online dating.

The number of reported Internet scams dropped slightly from previous years, but the total lost jumped \$40 million, according to the report released Thursday by the FBI and the National White Collar Crime Center.

The report, based on data from the Internet Crime Complaint Center, shows men lost more than women on average - \$765 compared to \$552 for women.

The report also shows the amounts lost increased with age. Victims in their 20s lost \$385 on average while people over 60 reported lost an average \$760 per scam.

The most common crime reported was auction fraud, in which consumers did not get the right merchandise they paid for. A consumer might "pay \$25 for a DVD that somebody actually recorded in the back of a movie theater," said FBI spokeswoman Cathy Milhoan.

The second most common crime was non-delivery of a purchased good, followed by confidence fraud, in which scammers ask consumers to rely on them, resulting in a financial loss.

About half the losses involved amounts less than \$1,000 and one-third involved amounts between \$1,000 and \$5,000.

The jump in money lost online might be due to new scheming techniques and generally more expensive electronic items being purchased online, said John Hambrick, a spokesman for the Internet Crime Complaint Center.

The report cites repeated increases over the years in pet scams, online dating fraud, spam e-mail and "phishing," in which scammers send phony e-mails to retrieve consumers' personal or financial information.

Many cases of crime involve scammers asking for charity relating to crises. Milhoan said scammers tried to profit from the Interstate 35 bridge collapse in Minnesota last year in which 13 people were killed.

"The scammer tries to prey on victims who are kind of in tune with what's going on in the world," she said. "The scam changes, but ultimately they're preying on the good will of people."

## EU Debates Cybercrime Law Enforcement

Two groups working separately to boost Europe's defenses against online crime will present proposals this week, almost a year after most of the nation of Estonia's links to the Internet were disrupted for days or weeks.

At a two-day conference starting Tuesday in Strasbourg, France, the Council of Europe will to review implementation of the international Convention on Cybercrime and discuss ways to improve international cooperation.

Cyber defense also will be on the agenda when heads of state from NATO's 26 member nations gather in Bucharest Wednesday for three days. The leaders are expected to debate new guidelines for coordinating cyber defense.

The Convention on Cybercrime, a binding treaty ratified by most members of the 47-nation Council of Europe, provide guidelines to protect computer users against hackers and Internet fraud.

The controversial agreement also covers electronic evidence used in prosecution of such offenses as child sexual exploitation, organized crime and terrorism. At this week's conference, the council will discuss guidelines to bolster the convention to improve cooperation between investigators and Internet providers, according to the council's Web site.

Participants and speakers at the conference - including police officials and representatives of technology companies such as Microsoft Corp., eBay Inc., McAfee Inc. and Symantec Inc. - also will address training.

NATO's three-day summit, which is to focus on enlarging the treaty organization and on its operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan, will include a special briefing on cyber defense, according to the treaty organization's Web site.

Some cybercrime experts are casting current Internet security challenges in terms of terrorism, while others remain focused on data loss, identity theft and fraud.

Marco Gercke, lecturer in computer law at University of Cologne in Germany, said cybercrime poses new law enforcement challenges because data can now be exchanged very fast over vast international reaches.

"Compared to regular terror attacks, it is much easier for the offenders to hide their identity. There are at least 10 unique challenges that make it very difficult to fight computer-related crime," said Gercke, one of the conference participants. "The success rate of cybercrime is very high."

Privacy advocates, the American Civil Liberties Union and others are concerned that the Cybercrime Convention presses businesses and individuals to aid law enforcement in new ways and subjects them to surveillance that violates the U.S. Constitution.

President Bush signed the treaty in 2003 and the U.S. Senate ratified it in 2006. The convention has been ratified by 21 other nations.

The type of assault Estonian Internet service providers suffered - which included denial-of-service attacks, where criminals flood a server with so many requests for connections that it is overwhelmed - is particularly difficult to block because servers can't easily distinguish between legitimate and bogus requests for access, experts have said.

Estonian officials initially blamed the attacks on the Russian government but later acknowledged they had no proof of government

involvement, though they said most of the computers launching the attacks were in Russia.

Estonia has set up a center to tackle computer-related crime and wants a global treaty on combatting cyber attacks because laws in many countries are inadequate or conflict, which can make prosecution of cyber criminals difficult.

The tiny Baltic state, which has one of the world's highest rates of Internet use, has said the attacks damaged its economy because it depends heavily on the Internet.

Russian officials deny any involvement in the cyber onslaught which erupted during violent protests by ethnic Russians against moving a Soviet-era monument out of the Estonian capital of Tallinn.

Web sites run by media outlets, government institutions and banks denied access to users outside Estonia. Among other impacts, Estonians traveling abroad couldn't get at their bank accounts.

The attack also included e-mail spam.

#### Internet Has a Trash Problem, Researcher Says

Somewhere between 1 percent and 3 percent of all traffic on the Internet is meaningless packets of information, used in distributed denial of service attacks (DDOS) to knock Web sites offline.

Those are the findings of Arbor Networks, a network traffic analysis company that recently looked at traffic flowing between more than 68 Internet service providers to see how much of it was malicious.

"The thing that's surprising is it's consistently 1 to 3 percent," said Danny McPherson, Arbor's chief research officer. "It's pretty significant."

To purchase the bandwidth that Arbor tracked in these DDOS attacks, a legitimate user would have to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars per month, McPherson said.

That's not a problem for criminals, however, who use the network connections of their victims to attack others.

DDOS attacks try to overwhelm the victim's servers with routine Internet messages. Attackers try to send so many packets that the victim's computers are unable to do their regular job - serving Web pages or sending e-mail, for example. They have become a common occurrence in recent years and have spawned a cottage industry of companies that try to mitigate their effects.

Studying the data from about 1,300 routers over 18 months, Arbor found that the tidal waves of SYN or ICMP (Internet Control Message Protocol) packets used in DDOS attacks rarely dropped below 1 percent of all traffic and could easily rise to 6 percent during peak periods.

Arbor's data show other trends too. Attacks drop off during Christmas and New Year's, perhaps while the attackers are "hungover or expending their

spoils," McPherson wrote in a blog posting.

The most common targets are Internet Relay Chat (IRC) servers, commonly used by hackers and technical types to meet up online and chat with each other.

With spam now making up almost all e-mail traffic, there's a considerable amount of junk clogging the Internet's pipes.

McPherson guessed that as much as 10 percent of the Internet's traffic could be "raw sewage."

### No, Your ISP Doesn't Own The Internet

In their subscriber contracts, some Internet providers explicitly absolve themselves of obligations that, it seems, no one would imagine they had in the first place.

For instance, Verizon Communications Inc. makes broadband subscribers agree that the company assumes no responsibility for the accuracy of things they may read on the Internet, or receive in e-mails. So don't complain to the company if that Wikipedia entry on wombats misstates their gestational period. (For the record, it does not.)

"Sometimes people think that everything they see online comes from their ISP or is somehow vetted and endorsed by the ISP," said Verizon spokeswoman Bobbi Henson.

Until March 3, Verizon also made subscribers agree that it does not own, operate or manage the Internet. That provision has now been eliminated because it's "generally well understood by most people" that Verizon does not own the Internet, while that may not have been the case in the early days of broadband, Henson said.

Another thing Verizon doesn't do for you, according to the Terms of Service: back up your hard drive.

Other ISPs try to ban nefarious practices like spamming and fraud with clauses so broad that it applies to a lot of legitimate activities.

Charter Communications, a cable company, forbids customers from altering or removing information from e-mail message headers, which sounds like they don't want you to change the subject line of an e-mail before forwarding it. Charter spokeswoman Anita Lamont said the company does not consider the subject line to be part of the header, and the provision is there to prevent people from forging headers to make it appear as if a message is coming from someone else.

AT&T Inc. prohibits users from posting to forums messages that could be expected to provoke complaints. Given that forums can be very touchy places, many messages could fall under this provision.

Windstream Communications bans "Satan" from its network, which sounds weird until you realize that it's referring to hacker software: System Administration Tool for Analyzing Networks, or SATAN.

## VeriSign Raises Doman Name Fees Again

VeriSign has raised the registration fee for domain names ending in .com and .net for the second time since the company took control of the top-level domains in 2006.

The security vendor said Thursday that the registry fee for .com would increase to \$6.86 from \$6.42, and the fee for .net would increase to \$4.23 from \$3.85. The increases are expected to take effect on Oct. 1, and are in line with VeriSign's agreement with ICANN, the U.S. organization in charge of managing the assignment of domain names and IP addresses, the company said.

In justifying the increase, VeriSign said traffic volume continues to increase with the emergence of consumer-driven services, the soaring number of Web-connected wireless devices, and the proliferation of technologies and services using the Domain Name System. The company says it processes a peak of more than 33 billion DNS queries per day, under normal traffic conditions.

In addition, the .com and .net infrastructures are continually being fortified against more sophisticated cyberattacks, VeriSign said. The company is deploying new proprietary security upgrades and monitoring tools to identify, track, and isolate malicious Internet traffic.

VeriSign plans to increase the capacity of its global Internet infrastructure by 10 times its current level by the year 2010, and increase its daily DNS query capacity to more than 4 trillion from 400 billion today, the company said. VeriSign also plans to increase the network bandwidth of its primary resolution centers around the world to more than 200 Gbps second from 20 Gbps.

VeriSign's last increase took effect on Oct. 15. At that time, the registry fee for .com increased to \$6.42 from \$6, and the fee for .net rose to \$3.85 from \$3.50.

It was the first registry fee increase for the two domain names since ICANN put the fee structure in place in 1999. Nevertheless, the increases were criticized by some as being unjustified.

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